

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 439 336

CG 029 905

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TITLE Understanding the Relationship between Learning Style and Multiculturalism for School Counselors.  
PUB DATE 1997-05-00  
NOTE 7p.; In: Caring in an Age of Technology. Proceedings of the International Conference on Counseling in the 21st Century (6th, Beijing, China, May 29-30, 1997); see CG 029 879.  
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150) -- Tests/Questionnaires (160)  
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS Counseling; \*Diversity (Student); Dropout Research; Elementary Secondary Education; \*Individual Differences; \*Minority Group Children; \*School Counselors; \*Underachievement

## ABSTRACT

A major concern of educators, counselors, and parents in the United States and throughout the world has been the costs and consequences of the high number of at-risk and dropout minority students. The intent of this paper is to explore the hypothesis that school counselors must know the implications of multicultural students' varied learning styles for both counseling and teaching. It states that this goal will ultimately assist counselors and educators in successfully reversing underachievement among culturally diverse students, and will assist multicultural adolescents with diverse learning styles. It suggests that counselors, using the DDLSI (Dunn and Dunn Learning Style Inventory, 1989), could assist adolescents and children in determining their learning style preference using appropriate interventions to help in understanding the students' strengths, and to help make accommodations for their diagnosed weaknesses. The role of the school counselor is seen as a proactive component of this concept: seeking to integrate this concept into the overall culture of the school, assisting with training of the faculty, administering the DDLSI to students and teachers, using follow-up meetings with students and parents to explain the material, and implementing strategies for accommodation. (Contains 12 references.) (JDM)

*Understanding the Relationship Between  
Learning Style and Multiculturalism for School Counselors*

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Dr. Hurley is on the faculty at San Francisco State University. She coordinates the School Counseling Specialization. She is also a member of the faculty for the newly established Marian Wright Edelman Institute for the Study of Families and Children. She has extensive experience in the public schools and gained national recognition as a teacher, counselor and administrator. She now is a counselor educator at or at SFSU.. (most likely the #1 university of multicultural diversity)

A major concern that educators, counselors and parents face in the U.S. and throughout the world has to do with the costs and consequences of the high number of at-risk and dropout minority students. They are also the concerns that face the government and community agencies that deal with escalating crime rates and welfare costs.

Recent research indicates that many at-risk and dropout students learn best in a processing style and with instructional strategies that differ significantly from those of young people who tend to perform well in a conventional classrooms.

The intent of this paper and talk will be to explore my hypothesis that school counselors must know the implications of multicultural students' varied learning styles for both counseling and teaching. They will then be able to better assist both the children with whom they counsel and the classroom teachers of these children.

This will ultimately assist counselors and educators in successfully reversing under achievement among culturally diverse students and will assist multicultural adolescents with diverse learning styles to enjoy learning more, develop confidence in their ability to master new and difficult information, and to discipline themselves while learning.

I will offer an opportunity for participants to discover their own individual learning style, and to examine their beliefs about how diverse students learn.

Researchers have compared the learning style of underachievers regardless of ethnicity ( Andrews, 1990; Dunn & Griggs, 1988) and learning style of various special education populations (Bauer, 1991) Underachievers in each group revealed essentially similar learning style traits and those different significantly from gifted students. A study in 1993 found that the learning style of GATE (Gifted and talented) students in math were essentially similar across cultures as were the learning styles of gifted students in literature and those gifted in art, music, dance, drama and sports. These studies also found that gifted adolescents within each talent area tended to reveal essentially similar styles, and that the learning style of each gifted group was found to be different from learning style of every other gifted group.

A great amount of the research done in this area has been done by Dr. Rita Dunn and Dr. Shirley Griggs of St. John's University in Jamaica, NY. With the support of the university, they have become the foremost authorities in

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the area of learning style preference theory and research. Most of the material for this paper was possible because of the large amount of literature available through both Dr. Dunn, Dr. Griggs and St. John's University

Changing demographics in the US schools indicate that within the next five years, the current minority population will have become the current majority in 53 major US cities. Many grants have provided huge sums of money for a variety of new programs for low achieving minority students. Very few of these new programs have shown any significant improvement in these students' standardized achievement test scores, and even fewer have examined the relationship between learning style and these test scores.

The few schools that show sound statistical evidence of increased achievement gain in the African-American students are schools that have implemented a learning style program that addressed how the low achievers most preferred to learn. (Dunn 1995)

A particular school in North Carolina in 1985 and 1986 had achievement scores only in the 30th percentile on the Calif. Achievement Test of Basic Skills (CTBS). After only 1 year of teaching students about the learning style strength, adjusting environment to permit alternate lighting and seating, and introduction to actual instruction responsive to those with tactile preference, the School has moved to the 40th percentile on the same test. After two years of the program, with reading and math taught in the afternoon and with small group instruction along with rest of program, scores moved up to the 75th percentile. And finally after 4 years, the school scored in the 89th percentile after taking the same test. During the same period African-American students in North Carolina consistently scored in the 20-30th percentile, whereas at the School this same population scored at 70 percentile or better.

Does the fact that these students scored statistically higher achievement scores only after LS instruction suggest they had previously not been taught correctly? Do these changes indicate that some students learn perhaps differently than how others in the US learn?

Before providing some answers on how students learn and why some succeed where others fail, I would like you to confront and consider your own beliefs about how students learn, and why some succeed when others fail.

#### Questionnaire on Learning Style and Multiculturalism, (Dunn & Griggs, 1995)

Consider the following questions carefully. At the end of each sentence, circle or write what you believe is the most accurate answer. After answering all the questions, compare your answers with the ones I will provide at the conference.

In the questionnaire "learning" refers to how individuals concentrate on, process, and remember new and difficult information; and "significantly" refers to statistically measurable differences.

#### Questions

1. Do most people in one culture learn differently from most people in another culture? yes\_\_\_ no\_\_\_
2. Do most people in the same culture learn in basically the same way? yes\_\_\_ no\_\_\_
3. Do boys and girls learn differently from each other? yes\_\_\_ no\_\_\_
4. Do high and low achievers learn differently from each other? yes\_\_\_ no\_\_\_
5. Is there a relationship between how someone learns and being gifted? yes\_\_\_ no\_\_\_

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6. Does learning style contribute to under achievement? yes\_\_\_ no\_\_\_
7. Do children and adults learn differently? yes\_\_\_ no\_\_\_
8. Do the *majority* of students (K-12) learn best by listening?\_\_\_ by reading?\_\_\_ by taking notes?\_\_\_ by experiencing?\_\_\_  
How large is the largest group that learns best through any of the above modalities?\_\_\_
9. Can a low auditory and low visual student become an A, B+ or B student in conventional schools? yes\_\_\_ no\_\_\_
10. (a) Do a *majority* of students (K-12) learn best through cooperative learning? yes\_\_\_ no\_\_\_ (b) Who does?\_\_\_  
(c) Who doesn't?\_\_\_ (d) How do we know?\_\_\_
11. (a) Do a *majority* of students learn best in early morning? yes\_\_\_ no\_\_\_ (b) Who learns best early in the morning?\_\_\_ (c) Who learns best at night?\_\_\_
12. Are people with one learning style more or less intelligent than people with another learning style? yes\_\_\_ no\_\_\_
13. (a) Are the majority of students "analytic" (step-by-step sequential) learners? yes\_\_\_ no\_\_\_ (b) What is the opposite of being analytic?\_\_\_ (c) Name another processing style\_\_\_ (d) Are people with one processing style more or less intelligent than people with another? yes\_\_\_ no\_\_\_
14. Are the majority of teachers "analytic" (step-by-step sequential) instructors? yes\_\_\_ no\_\_\_
15. Are there differences among culture concerning attitudes toward school and teachers? yes\_\_\_ no\_\_\_
16. How do selected learning-styles elements change based on growth and development?
17. Is it necessary to consider an adolescents' learning style when selecting various counseling techniques and interventions? yes\_\_\_ no\_\_\_
18. Identify a counseling approach that accommodates analytic students and another that accommodates global students.

#### Intro. to the Concept of Learning Styles

According to Dunn and Griggs, learning style is the way in which each of us concentrates, processes and retains new and difficult information. To determine an individual's learning style traits, we must use a comprehensive instrument — one that will diagnose many different traits. The instrument that has the highest reliability and validity and is used most in research on learning style is the Dunn, Dunn & Price Learning Style Inventory (Dunn, Dunn, and Price Learning Style Inventory, 1989). It is not possible to identify student's learning style traits correctly without an instrument, because some traits are not observable even to an experienced educator.

The theoretical basis from the Dunn & Dunn models emerged in the 70's. The theory of brain lateralization demonstrated that the left hemisphere of the brain was associated with verbal and sequential abilities and the right hemisphere dealt with emotions and with spatial, holistic processing. This theory continues to be debated—it is clear that we concentrate, process and remember new and difficult information under very different conditions. (Dunn and Dunn 1992).

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Auditory and visual perceptual strength, passivity, and self-oriented or authority-oriented motivation, often correlate with high academic achievement. On the other hand tactile and kinesthetic strengths—a need for mobility, nonconformity and peer motivation—often correlate with low academic achievement. (Dunn & Dunn, 1993)

Cognitive style theory suggests that individuals process information differently, based on either learned or inherent traits. Many of the Dunn & Dunn researchers throughout the world looked at variables of field dependency/independence, global/analytic, simultaneous/successive and/or left or right preference processing. They then went on to research whether relationships existed between these cognitive dimension and student characteristics that appeared to be more or less responsive to environment, emotions, social and psychological stimuli. This research found that selected variables often clustered together.

Relationships appeared to exist between learning that happened with few or no interruptions in a quiet environment with bright lights, in formal seating with little or no intake as being an analytic left. Conversely, adolescents who often requested "breaks" while learning, and preferred concentrating in an informal, softly lit and sound packed environment with snacks, revealed high scores as global right processors. (Dunn & Bruno, 1990)

When information is presented step by step, analytics learn best; while understanding the concept first and details later is found to be the best way globals learn. Most important here is that research tell us that both types can reason but they do it using different strategies. (Dunn, Dunn and Price, 1995)

So where is all this going and what does this have to do with counseling? Speaking from my experience as a public school teacher, administrator, director of guidance and counselor and now as a school counselor educator and university professor and considering the extensive amount of research by Dunn and Price, I would like to hypothesize this notion. I would suggest that unless the concept of learning style preference and the multicultural implication is integrated into the school counselor training and required competencies in our universities so they may use this knowledge in their work, they will not be able to counsel and assist the underachieving "at risk" student population that so desperately needs their counsel.

This population is the group with whom school counselors and others who work with children and adolescents more often devote most of their time. Failure to achieve in school is at the top of the list of indicators for adolescent substance abuse, at-risk behavior for "dropping out", and for low academic motivation and achievement. (Hurley, 1993)

Counselors and therapists using the DDLSI (Dunn and Dunn Learning Style Inventory, 1989) could begin to assist adolescents and children in determining their learning style preference with appropriate interventions that will help to assist in an understanding of a student's strengths, and how to manage and make accommodations for their diagnosed weaknesses.

A school counselor must be seen as a proactive proponent of this concept; seeking to integrate this concept in to the overall culture of the school, assisting with training of faculty, administering the DDLSI to students and teachers, and following up with meetings with student and parents to explain the material, and implement strategies for accommodation.

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Like education, school counseling programs are in a state of crises (most especially in California) due to horrendous cutbacks in budget and personnel. Student personnel services are the first reduced and school counselors need to be accountable and demonstrate that their programs and services make a difference. What better evidence of this than to be able to show statistics such as the school in NC which implemented a learning style preference program that reflected significantly improved achievement scores.

Some educational leaders are recognizing that the process of learning is critically important. To help student learn to love learning by nurturing student self concept, independence, locus of control and positive attitudes toward school, should be the major mission of all school counselors. (Krumboltz, 1988).

Counseling is an interactive learning process between counselor and counselee. It should assist the counselee in the understanding of self and others, and the environment in which they function, and result in positive changes in behavior and attitudes. There are over 250 conceptually distinct approaches to counseling (Parlass 1980). They all differ in terms of many aspects: diagnosis, technique, philosophy, assumptions, personality constructs. Most counselors use a systemic eclecticism. The majority of these approaches have been designed for use with children and adolescents whose developmental needs are different from those of adults. These children/adolescents require approaches that are compatible with their particular ability to absorb, process and retain information. Counseling approaches based upon individual and multicultural learning style preferences is a possible model for use with this population.

It is my intent to share the research concerning multiculturalism and its relationship to learning style, and how that relationship can be used by school counselors to assist many of the "at risk" students that they see regularly.

In closing I would like to quote Drs. Dunn and Griggs who suggest that,

....."There is no such thing as a cultural-group style. There are cross-cultural and intracultural similarities and difference among all peoples, and those differences are enriching when understood and channeled positively. By recognizing the wealth of diversity among us and our students and clients, educators and counselors can enhance learning and living for those adolescents with whom we come into contact—and for all the people with whom each of them interacts forever thereafter."

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